

Call to attention

As we pause between Advent and the coming year I believe the scripture would challenge us to examine if we can see the God in the midst of the aftermath. That is, in the midst of things not having gone the way we had planned. In a year like this, like 2020, we are surrounded by reminders of just how quickly life can radically change. Yes it can, but it is not really the change that throws us off, it is that we don't know what to do in the change. It is the paralyzing of life.

Now don't be fooled into thinking that this past year is a unique instance either. Think about all the micro-2020's that you have experienced in your life. The 3AM phone calls. The uncovered secrets. The expected news never coming. The moment you realize that you didn't know what you were getting into, and its far too late. So, when we are alone, and we just can't put it together all that has happened, or what could still happen, can you see the Lord in it? Do you trust him in it? Do we trust that he has not lost his way? That he has not forgotten about you as yet again you have hit the ground, been overlooked, feel misplaced, dismissed? You are not as prepared as you thought. You don't have everything you think you need. You don't know what you will do when the time comes. Do you trust him in it? Do we trust that he has not changed his mind toward us? That he does not fluctuate in capriciousness. What things do you tell yourself in the cold of the morning when you cannot sleep, "if this would just happen", or "If only..." Do you see and trust the grace of God towards you in the midst of 2020 and the rest of life?

Today I am aiming for us to see at least three ways that God shows himself in the midst of life's aftermath. Three ways that we can be reminded, that he functions both in our passage and with us.

--READ GEN 15--

1) In the midst of weakness God Comforts 15.1-6

The passage opens by reminding us how God had delivered the five kings of the east over to Abram and his band of men. This is an amazing event, because the author tells us that Abram and 318 trained men from his house defeated these five kings, and chased them out of town. What is interesting for our purposes here is that Gen 15 does not open up with an 'at-a-boy kind of vibe. No, instead we get a much different kind of tone. A tone of fear, a tone of frustration. In the midst of weakness, God comforts. It would seem that the events of the previous chapter had brought up some sore spots Abram. Some feelings of vulnerability. In the aftermath of the battle, God speaks to the heart of Abram and reminds him of his promises. Abram was originally from the East, a place called Ur of the Chaldeans. What brought him here, to the land of Canaan, was a call from Yahweh. In Gen 12 we read:

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen 12.1-3)

What is unique about this promise is that Abram and his wife Sarai have a little problem, that is Sarai is barren (Gen 11.30), and they are both getting older. This is certainly not the typical way

of building a nation. So, by the time we get started in Genesis 15, there is a major sense of expectation for this family to start soon. It's not that Abram doesn't believe God, but he is simply facing the facts of being an old man with a wife who is unable to have children.

God reminds Abram of his promise 15.1

It is this place though that Yahweh forces the issue of Abram's to see the error of his perception of God and what he is doing. So, in the midst of Abram's frustration he must come to terms with what God has not done. Here he must admit, this is not what he had in mind when he was called. That he just can't understand how God could possibly work with the way things are.

So, as he trembles in the aftermath of chapter 14, feeling his age, He senses the time is near. It is at this time the Lord speaks to Abram: "Fear not Abram, I am your shield, your reward shall be very great" But we find that Abram is not comforted. His mind is not following, he is stuck in the mud so to speak. He says, "I continue childless" or better put, "I shall die childless." In reminding Abram of what he plans to do, Abram only sees, "I'm almost dead, and so is my family. How much could you give me? It will all just end in another's hands." What does it matter now?

When We Get Stuck

This is how we are so often is it not. We get stuck, in the midst of the aftermath of whatever it may be, we hear things that are meant to calm our anxieties, our fears, but all they do is

uncover our jaded hearts, and as we hear these token encouragements, we turn to God in our arrogance and ask him, “what could you give me, since what I want, what I expected is clearly not going to happen?” What could you do for me God? I want that, and don’t you see it’s not going to happen now. I mean how could it?” In the midst of the aftermath of our ideas falling apart, we go to God and ask him, “what now?”

He does not allow Abram to settle 15.4-6

God does not fold his arms here with Abram. In the midst of his vulnerability, when Abram realizes his plan, his own idea, is turning upside down, God gives grace. He corrects Abram with clarity. The author wants this to be crystal clear too. Remember how Abram addresses God? He said “Behold” “Look. Pay attention to this detail” and when Abram is fresh out of hot air, the author speaks to us saying, “Behold. Look. Pay attention to this detail” And he proceeds to tell Abram what is what. That is, “Nothing has changed Abram” I am keeping my promises to you. Neither Eliazar or any other will be your heir, but the one who comes from your own loins will be your heir.”

It is at this moment that we see the purpose of the aftermath, that is the craftsmanship that goes into how God will do his work. He is not just looking to create a people, but he making a people out of nothing. Put another way, it is better that Abram know it is in the midst of the all that makes Abram unable, that Yahweh bring his plan about. He is after Abram’s heart. Yahweh wants Abram to really understand that he is not in the business of doing things in a forgettable way. He is not interested in doing what he has promised in way that will be simply chalked up to a close-call or a one-off. No, he is about being remembered. He is about being recognized for

his amazing ways. He is about revealing his glory. In doing so he sets the expectation for what he will do. Is this not the way of our Lord? The one who through all history has chosen broken men and women, those who bring little to the table, and he does amazing things through them, and to show simply that it is him who does it.

He shows him the night sky, and almost like a flash-back to Genesis one, He says, “look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them – so shall your offspring be”

Now we are right to hear this, and thing wow, that’s a massive number, after all our according to the Google machine something like 5-10,000 stars are actually visible to the naked eye from Earth. It is meant to overwhelm Abram, and it is meant to overwhelm us. Abram, who wants one son, an heir for his home to continue is told of an enumerable people, and not just as a rough prediction, but as a promise from the one who placed every star where it hangs, and directs each to blaze with unrelenting intensity. Yes, Abram (and us) are to be overwhelmed here. As such, we must ask ourselves why when faced with such frustration and even temptation or doubt do we forget who we are dealing with? Not just the creator, not just the one who live through all of history, but the one who with every right, and ability would rather show us and remind us who he is. As with Abram, he would prefer to let us see the damage, and in the midst of life see, that he is there, and he is able to be trusted. That the aftermath is designed to remind us of who we are, and what we cannot do. It is there to thrust us to him, to watch as he makes nations out of those who could not conceive.

In the midst of this, we find that the author pauses to express a reality that is observed in Abram. He believes the Lord, and the Lord sees that belief as good, but not just in the sense of observation, but in that he is considered by God to be in right standing. They are in fellowship, or what one called “a divine sentence of approval”

2) In the midst of faith, God encourages 15.7-17

He reminds his Abram who he is by evoking the past 15.7

So, in the midst of faith God encourages this trust, by invoking a recollection of Yahweh is. Saying, “I am Yahweh, the one whom brought you out...” In doing this, he is both reminding Abram, of what he has done, but Abram believing needs to be encouraged, “How can I know...” So the Lord does what anyone would do in this day and age, and he initiates terms to formalize a commitment.

He demonstrates he is committed 15.8-12

What this is, is the act of a covenant being prepared. The animals would be cut in half, and then each piece would be set across from the next creating a path way of sorts. In doing this, the parties would walk together down this path, and in the process of this, would make an oath of sorts, really a curse. “May what I say be, less I be made like these.” So, the answer to Abram’s question for how he can know, is that a covenant is to be made between Yahweh and Abram.

He has nothing to hide 15.13-16

Notice, how the Lord does not sugar coat his plan for his people. The way of the God's people will not be one that is marked by ease. It is not a simple way, but a way that will be filled with burden, and suffering. Even more, look at what he tells Abram - - > as for you, you will not get to see any of it. In acts, it says he received no inheritance, not even a foot's length (Acts 7.5). So, what of it for Abram? He will have a son, and then die a good age.

He guarantees the promise with a by bearing a curse. 15.17

What happens next, is very peculiar. As I mentioned before, the normative way of formalizing the covenant was for both parties to walk between the pieces. In this case, we have a flaming torch and a firepot representative of God, yet he is passing through alone. In doing so, he guarantees the promise to Abram by evoking a curse on himself. Now, to be clear he does not do this for his own benefit. He does this for Abram to encourage his faith. God goes to great lengths doing what ought not to be done by God, for the faith of his people he demonstrates his commitment.

Do you know the great lengths your God has gone to show his commitment to his people, to you Christian? What more could we need than the curse that was born by our Lord as a consider the obstacles to our faith. Just as he evoked the curse on himself before Abram showing his commitment, so has God the Son the seed of Abraham bore the curse to secure a people

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree—So that in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles...” (Gal 3.13-14a).

3) In the midst of the promise, God binds himself to his people 15.18-21

There are at least two things that are said here explicitly:

The region will be filled by Abram’s people – The land will be large and great.

The Abram’s seed will occupy the land of ten nations – The seed of Abraham will grow exponentially, to the point of displacing and occupying many people groups or nations.

However, there is one greater implication here. That is, like the image of the stars, and the image of the land, and the image of the nations that will be removed – these are pointing to a greater end. We must know that there is an even greater trajectory in mind here. A trajectory that ends in Christ the true offspring of Abraham. Where through him, the promises of God would go far beyond the boundaries of the land of Israel, and bring in many from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

“Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” (Ga 3:7–9.)

And

“for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.
“(Ga 3:26–29.)

If you are in Christ this is your heritage. This is your line. Your story. In the midst of old age, and no family, and bareness, and every other obstacle the creator God has pursued his people, has pursued you and me. His plan was to give and fill the land with offspring, but the fullness of it is filling the earth through those who are in Christ. Heirs by him according the promises.

If you are not in Christ, if you do not know where you stand with him, this is written for you

“No unbelief made him (Abram) waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”
(Ro 4:20–25.)

Conclusion

In the midst of weakness, we are comforted by the Lord, yet even more so we are comforted by his work in us even in our weakness. Recall how the Lord comforted Paul in his affliction stating,

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Co 12:9–10.)

We need to be reminded in the midst of life’s wreckage, that God is still there and still doing his thing. He is not surprised, he is not derailed, he is there, and he is about his work. We must see the endless grace in the wreckage, knowing that he is there.

Look at how nothing had changed between verses 1 and 5. The only difference is that Yahweh had reminded Abram of what he already had told him – it was not new, it was redundant, but what it did do was demonstrate that all in spite of all Abram’s observations, being old, not having a child, surviving battle, that God was not in any way slowed. In spite of all the reasons to not happen, it would happen.

Do not miss this, in the midst of what you are in, what you will be in, what you have been in God is not surprised, he is not shocked, and he will not slow down for one moment – Sure it should cultivate faith. Yes, it should encourage the weak, but most of all, let your affections be multiplied. Be amazed at who it is we serve, who loves us, and who invites us to experience his amazing work in history. Let your soul overflow with worship for the Lord, so

when aftermath comes in- you look and say that is nothing. I must remember my God. He has built nations from the barren. He has delivered his people, from hand of Egypt, he has handed over the land of Canaan. He has installed kings, and removed them the same. He has judged his people and restored them again. He has come incarnate in the as an infant, served as a slave, never sinned, died and was raised in glory. He is reigning even now at the right-hand of the father, and he has secured us as his people. When you are in the midst of this life, know the Lord God will not be stopped, and he is committed to his people.